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**Continuity, Change and the Circulation of Social
Practices**

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Continuity, Change and the Circulation of Social Practices

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Abstract

Current scholarly work on mobilities has largely focused on how practices of mobility produce space, place and landscape through their enactment and representation. There has been significantly less attention to the study of how social practices move; that is, the ways in which socially recognised ways of doing are produced in and through mobility. Although it is generally agreed in the literature of various disciplines that practices are on the move at different scales, the mobilities of practice are yet to be developed explicitly. This article focuses on the case of music making to analyse the processes through which social practices circulate across networks of relationships. It analyses a musical tradition from southeast Mexico that is currently diffused, reproduced and re-created across transnational/translocal communities of practitioners in the United States and Mexico to argue that social practices are sustained and transformed in movement and through mobilities.

Keywords: Mobilities, Practice, Music Making, Tradition, Friction

The circulation of social practices

Human mobilities are partly constituted by socially established and recurrent ways of doing: commuting to work, walking around parks, travelling as a tourist and migrating to a different city are examples of their ample repertoire. Organising, executing and recalling practices of mobility are intrinsic to everyday life. While these multiple facets of mobilities have been traditionally studied by different disciplines as separate phenomena (Cresswell, 2010), contemporary scholarly work has brought focus to different forms of movement, flow and networks. Although the mobilities literature encompasses a diverse range of approaches, all have a common interest in the dynamic nature of social and cultural phenomena.

Similar to the mobilities perspective, theories of social practice constitute an emerging body of literature that has gained a certain salience in the context of contemporary cultural theories, particularly among researchers looking for alternatives to classic approaches in the social sciences (see, for instance, Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & von Savigny, 2005). Theories of practice tend to locate the social in a field of practices; that is, in the series of connections that link complex forms of 'socially established cooperative human activities' (MacIntyre, 2007: 187). In broad terms, 'practice' commonly refers to a collective form of action. The origins of this theoretical orientation can be traced to Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein,

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although they have a more explicit background in authors from different traditions, such as Harold Garfinkel (1984 [1967]), Michel Foucault (1990) or Pierre Bourdieu (2013).

Recent theorisations of practice coincide in the assumption that practices are constituted by interconnected elements. In this respect, the philosopher of social science Theodore R. Schatzki (1996: 89) refers to practices as composed of ‘doings and sayings’. Similarly, Andreas Reckwitz (2002a: 249) defines them as ‘bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge’. With the aim of bringing clarity to the constituent elements of practice, Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar and Matt Watson (2012: 21-41) have grouped different elements to produce an analytical framework that categorises them within three sets: materials, meanings and competences. This strategy has the advantage of providing broad categories that reduce the complexity of the elements that integrate practice. Most importantly, it makes room for the analysis of how the linkages between such elements are forged through stability and routinisation. The production of configurations of elements is seen as an ongoing process, hence the emphasis on the dynamic character of social practice.

Practices are literally and metaphorically on the move: while practitioners, artefacts and information travel across geographical demarcations, there is also a less apparent circulation and flow of interrelated embodied dispositions, competencies, meanings and actions during the enactment of performances and across networks of relationships. Physical displacement is intertwined with multiple forms of flow and circulation that configure and reconfigure social practices. Theories of mobility and practice are two bodies of literature that have until very recently focused on cultural change in relatively independent ways, suggesting the importance of analysing the circulation and diffusion of practices (Canzler, Kaufmann & Kesselring, 2008; Cresswell, 2010; Cresswell and Merriman, 2011; Shove et al., 2012). If the study of practices of mobility has emerged as a recognised field of research, why not examine the mobility of practices as well? With very few exceptions, this field of inquiry has not been explicitly developed and requires further examination. Despite the empirical relationship between practices and mobilities, and the commonalities between these two approaches, the mobilities of practices have been sparsely addressed in the scholarly literature.

This article examines the ways in which social practices circulate across networks of relationships. By focusing on various forms of mobility, it looks at how people engage in socially established ways of doing and knowing (Schatzki et al. 2005), which for the purposes of this study are understood as the socio-cultural dimensions of bodily dispositions, artefacts, ideas, emotions, tacit knowledge, rules and routines. This conceptualisation and theorisation of mobilities of practice elaborates on the few studies that explicitly address this field: Shove et al. (2012) on ‘circuits of reproduction’ and Hui (2012; 2013a; 2013b) on mobile practices, networks and materials. Shove et al. explore the ways in which elements, practices and the links generated among them reproduce and sustain practices through interrelated performances. Drawing on theories of social practice, Hui examines how specific elements and people move with practices by analysing the cases of patchwork quilting and bird watching (2012; 2013a), and Ashtanga yoga and leisure walking (2013b). In analysing the relationship between the travels of practitioners and the circulation of practice, Hui’s research demonstrates the ways in which taking part in practices produces and shapes movement, and the ways in which travel mediates practices. These works are novel contributions to this emerging area in socio-cultural research. In this article I build on these and other recent works on practice and mobilities to advance the examination of the circulation of ways of

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making and experiencing socially established activities across networks of relationships. By focusing on the empirical case of a musical tradition, I aim to advance an approach to ‘the social’ as enacted, temporal and situated, based on the analysis of various layers of mobility, which I call mobilities of practice.

The analytical distinction between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance elaborated by Shove et al. (2012) offers an entry point for understanding such circulation. The enactment of performances (or the act of practising) is given by the articulation of the elements in specific time and space. This concept becomes analytically relevant when contrasted with practice as entity, which alludes to the collection of multiple, recurrent enactments in times and spaces. The accumulation of enactments, the argument follows, turns practices into coherent and recognisable activities (Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2012). In the case of musical practices, this analytical contrast can be translated into the relationship between practising music (the unfolding of a given performance) and musical practice (the set of complex and relatively coherent activities that constitute a recognisable practice). Contrasting between practising and practice becomes particularly useful in examining the circulation of elements that takes place during performances and the circulation of a practice within networks of relationships.

This article draws on the ethnographic study of *son jarocho*, a musical practice that is currently sustained and informed by groups of practitioners across Mexico and the US. While there are various musical practices that also circulate across these two countries (see, for instance, Madrid 2011), *son jarocho* is a remarkable case of mobility because of the ways in which it is currently appropriated, reproduced and re-created by transnational/translocal communities of practitioners. The tension between continuity and transformation of this musical tradition emerges from multiple layers of mobility, such as the articulation of elements during performances, their diffusion across networks that extend across locations, and their historical trajectories as recognisable ways of doing. The following section briefly contextualises the processes that forged *son jarocho* as a coherent and recognisable practice, particularly in relation to the emergence of this practice as a regional festivity.

The journeying of a musical tradition

When contemporary practitioners refer to *son jarocho* as music, they are in fact alluding to an organic understanding of music making that involves the articulation of dance, verse and instrument playing at the traditional celebration called *fandango*. At these festivities people get together to make music around a wooden platform that is used by dancers as a stomp-box. The relevance of this artefact, called *tarima*, can be hardly exaggerated because it constitutes the epicentre of action during performances. Despite resembling a rustic stage, this wooden platform is not a surface used by entertainers to become visible and thereby differentiated from the audience; it is, more than anything else, a percussive instrument that rhythmically structures the performance when dancers stomp on it with hard-soled shoes. Dancing and making music around a *tarima* has constituted the most representative *son jarocho* event. This artefact is central to the identity of *son jarocho* as it differentiates it from other musical practices and provides a converging space for its enactment.

Fandango emerged as a popular celebration among the peasants of the region in southeast Mexico called Sotavento. Its identification with this specific location stemmed from long-term historical processes in contexts of socio-cultural flow and movement. During colonial

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times, the coast of the Gulf of Mexico linked central Mexico to the Caribbean and the Iberian Peninsula. The maritime routes that linked the *Carrera de Indias* constituted a complex infrastructure that connected the colonial centres in Spain to the Americas. The Caribbean constituted the junction of these routes, a nodal region with a constantly changing population and a dynamic economy fuelled by intense legal and illegal commerce. People, commodities, artefacts, goods, ideas, and (often conflicting) ways of doing and being were displaced through the wide maritime networks that connected these regions. Musical repertoires are some of the remnants of the circulation of practices from which *fandango* emerged.

The musical repertoire of contemporary *son jarocho* has been traced back to the songs that circulated across these regions during the 16th and 17th century (García de León, 2002). The gradual transformation of the ways of making music and celebrating that travelled across the Atlantic gave place to distinct regional repertoires. According to García de León (2002), the '*cancionero ternario caribeño*' (ternary songbook of the Caribbean) is the name of musical structures characterised by a predilection for ternary measures, alternation on the accentuation of particular beats (such as *hemiola*¹) and certain forms of polyphony derived from baroque music. By the end of the 18th century, the music, dance and verse singing performed at the celebrations among the peasants of Sotavento acquired the form of *fandango* (García de León, 2002, 2009; Ávila, Pérez Montfort & Rinaudo, 2011).

The emergence of nation states in the Americas in the 19th century brought a series of political and economic transformations. The reconfiguration of the maritime and terrestrial forms of transportation of people, object, ideas and practices across and within the newly formed countries established new conditions of exchange and connectivity (García de León 2011). In this period *fandango* acquired a distinct character as a product of the relative isolation of the region, which consolidated it as a regional practice. The previous circulation of assorted elements across distant territories became specific ways of making music through the recurrent configuration of artefacts such as musical instruments, know-how on music making, dance and the improvisation of verses, and the meanings of *fandango* as a distinct form of festivity.

These configurations were transformed during the 20th century, especially in relation to the ways in which practitioners used this practice. During the 20th century this celebration became less common in Sotavento due to various factors, such as increasing urbanisation, changes in the economic structure and methods of agricultural production (Léonard and Velázquez, 2000), and intense internal and transnational migration (Pérez, 2003). Yet, significant changes to its fortunes appeared when these ways of dancing and making music were used by the official propaganda of the Mexican State to forge an imaginary of the national based on regional, folkloric manifestations of culture. The bureaucracy of the Mexican government took this popular celebration to the cinema, radio and TV, but not before an intense process of stylisation. In fact, only the music and dance performed at *fandangos* served as models for these new folklorised performances, trimming off what this bureaucracy considered excessively rustic and rural, reinventing them as a show on stage (Pérez Montfort, 2007). *Fandango* continued to be part of the everyday life in scattered

¹ *Hemiola*, also known as *sesquialtera*, refers to a musical meter that alternates between duple and triple time within groups of eight notes. This way of organising rhythms was mentioned in Spanish musical treatises since the 16th century, such as Juan Bermudo's *Declaración de instrumentos*, published for the first time in 1555 (see Bermudo, 2009).

communities in Sotavento, although it was overshadowed by the official version of *son jarocho*, which became the most representative performance of Veracruz (Barahona, 2013).

At different moments of the twentieth century, the Ministry of Education and some groups of specialists interested in traditional music and dance raised the need for documenting the cultural expressions of the various regions of Mexico (Figuerola, 2007), although the efforts were meagre. It was not until the 1970s that various groups of young enthusiasts from Sotavento undertook a series of actions aimed to 'keep *son jarocho* alive', starting a so-called rescue of *fandango* and, in particular, its music and dance. They took concrete actions such as recording the old, forgotten musicians from rural towns, learned how to play, sing, dance and construct instruments from them, and (most importantly) taught others how to do it. To prevent its apparent extinction, the music and dance of *fandango* was promoted as a cultural expression to be valued and preserved. These enthusiasts understood the tradition as rooted in a rural region of southeast Mexico, and were opposed to the stylised interpretation created by the official propaganda and the media.

Since the last three decades of the twentieth century, involving others in keeping the practice of *son jarocho* alive has been the main strategy for the diffusion of this tradition. Workshops, the main device used for the mobilisation of *son jarocho*, are meetings in which people interested in learning to play and dance get together to practise with some regularity. These gatherings are non-institutionalised, friendly and unofficial learning spaces. No qualification is awarded, although they are far from being mere 'jam sessions' in which to experiment with folk music. Workshops are meant to be spaces for learning a specific repertoire that is performed in particular ways. At first, they started as camping events in which practitioners learnt traditional *son jarocho*, directed particularly towards young people from southeast Mexico. Later on, the model proved to be successful as it rapidly expanded to encompass many urban locations in Mexico and the US.

Workshops became an 'ecological niche' through which traditional *son jarocho* circulated across emergent communities of practitioners. This process was driven by the differentiation between a musical tradition presented as rooted in Sotavento and its folklorised 'other'. This distinction acquired its full social meaning in the process of diffusing a practice that was at apparent risk of extinction. The successful circulation of this tradition across locations in Mexico and the US was possible, in part, because of the consolidated migratory system and the economic integration between these two countries (see Delgado Wise and Favela, 2004; Castles & Delgado Wise, 2008). However, it is important to note that this practice has not been appropriated only by migrants from southeast Mexico. These mobilities are not unidirectional. The practitioners who attend workshops and organise *fandangos* in the US do not constitute a bounded ethnic community and come from different backgrounds.

Groups of practitioners that extend across geographically dispersed locations often frame this musical practice in ethnic or regional terms. Yet, their constitutive elements are not inherently 'ethnic' or 'regional'. Practice-specific elements become meaningful through their circulation and articulation during performances – in the case of *fandango*, the arrangement of a repertoire, *tarima*, musical instruments, tacit understandings, competencies, rules, routines and many other elements produces a musical tradition that is re-created across communities of practitioners. To illustrate this point, we now turn to the unfolding of enactments to examine how the constitutive elements of a practice are put in motion and become linked to broader processes of circulation.

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Figure 1: *Fandango* in Sotavento. Author's photograph.

Constitutive elements

Practices need recurrence in order to become socially recognised activities. This consistency, however, rarely involves a neat congruence from one enactment to another. *Son jarocho* performances are similar enough to be identified as a way of making music, even when the characteristics of individual *fandangos*, workshops and live-group performances fluctuate. In general terms, the identity of a practice is given by a series of elements that determine what that practice is as opposed to what it is not. The process through which specific arrangements of elements are articulated constitutes the link between a single performance and a recognisable practice-as-entity. It is during their enactment that practices become distinguishable ways of doing – in *son jarocho*, for instance, there is a significant differentiation between ‘traditional’ and ‘folklorised’ ways of making music. Rules, routines, artefacts and the necessary know-how for their manipulation are sets of regularities that establish that specific entities count as meaningful elements (D’Andrade, 1984: 91).

Practice-specific elements constitute the most significant trademarks of mobile practices. Just as with the ‘circuits of reproduction’ proposed by Shove et al. (2012), or the ‘immutable mobiles’ advanced by Latour (1987) and Law and Mol (2001), the articulation of these elements in different contexts often delineates in various ways the contours of socially recognised activities. As these authors suggest, these contours become vague when their reproduction in different contexts depends on the adaptation of their constitutive elements.

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Artefacts, rules and routines might not be replicated in exactly the same way because they need to fit the varying circumstances of performance. Although playing with relatively consistent and logical rules is central to the unfolding of performances, every event entails the adjustment of those regularities to altered conditions.

Agreeing that something counts as something else is often a way of supporting a particular set of ideas and, to an extent, a form of belonging to a group of people who share those views. The links that are formed among constitutive elements during the enactment of practices form regular events embedded in frames of collective action. *Fandangos* illustrate this type of adherence as practitioners act in a way that conforms to the regularities of performances. These regularities have been historically reproduced to enable and constrain the unfolding of events. An example of these constitutive elements of *fandango* comes from the continuity of a repertoire, the consistent use of practice-specific instruments and the reproduction of rules and routines during performances that have been replicated in different locations as part of the mobilities of *son jarocho*. However, their recurrent enactment in different contexts has led to significant variations. In the following paragraphs, this ambivalence is exemplified by a form of *fandango* that has been adapted to the circumstances of a community of practitioners in a city of the American west coast². But before analysing such an event, it is necessary to introduce the background of the group of practitioners who organised it, because their personal trajectories are related to the contextualised appropriation of this practice.

A *fandanguito* in Portland

About six years ago, a small community of *son jarocho* enthusiasts emerged in Portland. They started a weekly workshop initially run by a small group of people who were already involved in this practice and moved from Seattle to that city. The original workshop facilitators have recently returned to Seattle, but now there are several practitioners with a reasonably good understanding of how to make *fandangos* and to run workshops. This small community has also been assisted by frequent visits of musicians and dancers from southeast Mexico and other cities in the US. The personal trajectories of the practitioners who attend these workshops vary greatly. Some of them are Americans whose families migrated from different regions of Mexico decades ago. Others are undocumented migrants from Mexico who find it increasingly hard to move across the border, or are skilled migrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries who arrived in the US at different times. And some others are music enthusiasts who do not speak Spanish or have a Mexican background and simply enjoy making this type of music.

The motivations that bring this heterogeneous group to make this type of music jointly are diverse and difficult to categorise. One practitioner, for example, told me how she discovered this practice at a party in which one of her friends had brought a *jarana*³: when her friend picked up the instrument and started playing, she remarked, 'it was something like love at first sound'⁴. While this anecdote describes the attachment of a practitioner to a practice,

² The name of the city has been substituted to guarantee the anonymity of the participants of this study.

³ The *jarana* is an instrument with five double strings derived from the baroque guitar (see Pareyón, 2007: 532).

⁴ Excerpt from notes taken after a conversation with an anonymous practitioner in the United States, July 18, 2013.

these types of narrative do not explicate why they become practitioners. Ostensibly, *son jarocho* making in the US could be approached as a nostalgic longing for a rural way of life lost in the past of Sotavento. However, this practitioner and her fellows in Portland do not come from southeast Mexico, and many have never been there. This is also the case in most communities of practitioners in the US. Framing *son jarocho* in diasporic or ethnic terms would fail to capture the meanings of this practice because this is not a form of long-distance regionalism.

There are, however, some vague patterns that I have identified as characteristic of the experience in Portland and in other locations in the US. Practitioners have found in this practice a space in which to socialise, make friendships, and engage their families in an activity that can be practised regardless of age. It is also an affordable form of entertainment because, apart from buying an instrument (which constitutes the most expensive item), the workshops are often free or attendees make a voluntary contribution after the session. This practice has been appropriated in such a way that regional and national differences are negotiated through music making. In their effort to learn and reproduce an ideal of traditional *son jarocho*, they have developed a flexible adherence to a tradition that has been adapted in different contexts.

While conducting fieldwork in Portland I attended and participated in the Saturday workshops at a cultural centre in a suburb of that city. Once the workshop finished, the groups of practitioners regularly spent a few hours chatting and having lunch at a nearby café. In one of those occasions the owner of that place, a man who migrated several years ago from southeast Mexico with his family, asked some of the musicians if they were interested in playing a few traditional pieces to celebrate the first anniversary of ‘this little piece of Veracruz in Portland’. Three of the most experienced musicians decided to prepare a few tunes and make a small recital. Some weeks later, once the Saturday workshop had finished, most practitioners headed towards the café as customary⁵. In the meantime, a dancer and I went to pick up a smaller *tarima* (the dance platform mentioned earlier in the article) because the one we were using at the cultural centre would not fit into the small venue.

As she was driving, she explained that these smaller *tarimas* have made it easier to play in a variety of spaces. Although they can only have one or two dancers at a time, these ‘*tarimas cajueleras*’ (*tarimas* that fit in the boot of a car) are practical because they can be easily transported and used for casual playing. She also stressed that these are used more often than the larger ones because they do not organise ‘real *fandangos*’ as often as they would like, and have opted to have shorter *fandangos* instead. The latter regularly start with a performance, often featuring visitors from other cities in the US or southeast Mexico, and then there is a little performance around one or two small *tarimas* in which everyone participates. These events are called *fandanguitos* (little *fandangos*) and reproduce many of the characteristics of the traditional celebration with a number of modifications, which will be addressed later in this section. ‘Real *fandangos*’, she said, ‘are nice, but take too much time and run until very late’. She also mentioned that it is hard for those with small children to attend the whole event and stay up until late hours at night. Possibly owing to different ways of structuring the timing of everyday life, staying up at night with children greatly differs across communities of practitioners.

⁵ The description of this event is based on fieldnotes regarding a *fandanguito* in the United States, June 15, 2013.

The café was so full by the time we arrived that we could hardly make our way through the tables to place the small *tarima* in a corner at the end of the room. The walls were colourfully decorated with paintings, paraphernalia and a large red flag of ‘Los Tiburones Rojos de Veracruz’, a soccer team from southeast Mexico. There was also a coffee roaster that had to be stopped because the three performers could not hear themselves tuning. The heat, the incessant conversations and the aroma of roasted coffee beans made one feel squeezed into a close, agreeable atmosphere. After a while the chatter faded out because a harp, *jarana* and *requinto*⁶ started playing a piece called ‘El Siquisiri’.

‘Bravo!’, the audience clapped as they were finishing the tune.

‘Bueno, pues gracias por venir, nosotros no tenemos nombre...’ [Well, thanks for coming, we have no group name...], one of the musicians said in Spanish, and then he switched into English. ‘We don’t have a name because we just got together two days ago to practise for this event and we are very thankful to Armando for inviting us to play here. And we are sending good vibes for him and for his place, we wish they continue doing great!’

‘Bravo!’, people yelled and clapped even more loudly.

‘So, many of you know this type of music’, Gerardo continued, ‘but for those who don’t know, this is called *son jarocho*. We played... the first *son* [piece] we played is called ‘Siquisiri’, and this *son* [piece] is part of a huge celebration called *fandango*, and the *fandango* is like a party, so the *fandango* usually opens with the ‘Siquisiri’. That’s why we chose to start with this one. The next one is ‘Balajú’, and I heard that people sing this one when there is a flood, and it talks about sailors and water, so that’s why they sing it when there is a flood in the lower areas of Veracruz’. After a brief re-tuning, the musicians started playing a new piece.

Here Gerardo, the musician who talked on behalf of the group, framed the event through these brief comments. I would like to focus on two points that are relevant for discussing the adaptation of the constitutive elements of this practice to specific situations. First, the choice of starting with ‘El Siquisiri’ is a convention followed at *fandangos* that was also replicated in this case. Despite the differences between a typical *fandango* and this adapted celebration, the gesture established a relationship between the two as a re-enactment in a different context. Gerardo also made a similar gesture when he described a tune they were playing (‘El Balajú’) in relation to the floods in the region of Sotavento. The rationale behind invoking Sotavento, its landscape and the celebration of *fandango*, is two-fold: it re-creates *son jarocho* as a tradition from a specific region, rooted in a customary way of doing that has been passed from generation to generation, and it also establishes a connection between that tradition and the enactment of the practice as it takes place in Portland.

Second, remarking on the absence of a name was not gratuitous because practitioners in this city have been concerned about the proliferation of *son jarocho* groups. By stressing the fact that they do not have a name, Gerardo indirectly suggested that this was an amateur recital in which three friends had put together a number of pieces for a small celebration. This assertion subtly emphasised that they did not get together to promote a musical group, but to cultivate

⁶ *Requinto* or *guitarra de son* is a four-string, melodic instrument played with a large plectrum.

the tradition. Playing *son jarocho* on stage has become a prominent form of performance for many groups based in the US and Mexico. As a result, the popularity of stage performances has apparently displaced *fandango* as the privileged space in which *son jarocho* is developed and displayed. Preoccupied with the displacement of *fandangos*, the practitioners in Portland have tried to organise regular celebrations, but they have not been successful for various reasons. They have found it hard to bring a large group of performers to the same event because their schedules differ, many of them find it difficult to stay up playing until late hours at night because of family commitments, and they lack a suitable space for these events, as the noise at night can disturb the neighbours. These justifications surprised me because of the stark contrast with the customs in Sotavento. In the latter place, schedules were much more flexible, staying up all night was not an impediment but a precondition of the event to take place, and the noise did not seem to disturb others as the space for *fandangos* was often improvised: a patio, a backyard, a clearing on the middle of the street. By contrast, practitioners in the US have seen the need to organise *fandangos* indoors or at parks to prevent noise problems.



Figure 2: Performance at a café. Author's photograph.

In Portland, *fandangos* are regarded as the ideal way to cultivate *son jarocho*. However, the simpler and flexible form of *fandanguito* is a convenient way of dealing with the problems mentioned above: these events are significantly shorter, can be organised earlier in the day, and tend to be less loud than typical *fandangos* because there are fewer performers. These adapted events have become much more suited to practitioners who are looking to exercise the skills that they learnt at workshops without the degree of performativity of a *fandango*. The versatile structure of these events probably makes them less intimidating for beginners. These points are related to the adaptation and innovation that has emerged from the transnational mobilities of this practice. The following paragraphs continue with the description of the event in the café in Portland to illustrate how *son jarocho* is produced as a meaningful tradition through the demarcation of ideal forms of ‘adequate’ performance.

Flexible adherence to a tradition

After playing seven tunes, the group finished their performance while the audience cheered them. The small *tarima* was then taken from a corner and placed right where the musicians were performing minutes before. The distinctive humming of *jaranas* being tuned increased as people among the audience picked their instruments and slowly approached the little *tarima*.

‘What do we play?’, someone asked without addressing anybody in particular.

‘I don’t know...’, another one said.

Gerardo then played the introduction of a piece called ‘El Buscapies’ and everybody joined in a few beats later. The rhythms were steady, the introductory verses were sung and the chord progressions were flowing. Because the *tarima* was very small and only allowed one dancer at a time, there were only women taking turns to dance, always following the convention of gently tipping the shoulder of the dancer who is going to be replaced, just as people in Sotavento do. The turns to take verses and the oscillation between dance and verse were smooth. Everyone knew each other, which made it easier to anticipate the sequence of verses and steps to come. The ending was well coordinated too: marking the strong beats, slightly slowing down the tempo, yelling ‘*Una!*’, as the custom goes. Then we played some other pieces: ‘La Morena’, ‘El Cascabel’ and, lastly, ‘La Bamba’.

The participation of some among the audience changed the dynamic of the event – the initial separation between performers and listeners was reshaped by their intervention. There were also people sitting at the tables, sipping their coffee and clapping at the end of each piece. The distinction between audience and performers was reconfigured through the partial involvement of part of the audience. Although resembling *fandango* in some ways, these events have a distinct circulation around a *tarima* that substantially differs from passive forms of entertainment that characterise stage performances. *Fandanguitos* simultaneously have wider participation and a greater distinction between audience and performers. To what extent are these types of performances ‘authentic’ or ‘acceptable’? Their liminality might leave the impression that these performances unintentionally fall between the folklorised and the traditional.



Figure 3: Indoors *fandango* in Portland. Author's photograph.



Figure 4: Outdoors *fandango* in San Diego. Author's photograph.

Here is the point in which context, as a spatio-temporal arrangement, reveals itself as productive and plural (Thrift, 1996: 43). Asserting a contrast between the folklorised and the traditional acquires a slightly different meaning when invoked in the US. In Portland, the pragmatic choices that involve making traditional *son jarocho* tend to be reproduced: tunings, repertoire, dance steps, verse structures and many other elements are articulated in a fairly consistent way. But as *son jarocho* musicians are not numerous in the US, such differences acquire a new character. In fact, the harpist who performed that day during the recital, and later in the *fandanguito*, is an experienced musician who has been playing folklorised *son jarocho* for decades. He migrated a long time ago from Mexico to the US, and has been partly making a living out of playing different forms of music and teaching private lessons. It was also in the US that he re-discovered a traditional way of playing *son jarocho*, and he occasionally attends the workshops. Far from overriding the differentiation between traditional and folklorised, the collaboration between these musicians confirmed it. Later that day, once the playing and dancing had finished and we were packing our instruments, I heard the harpist commenting to Gerardo:

That was good playing. I liked playing with you because everything goes slower and smoother. And it was also good that you introduced the *sones* [pieces], otherwise I would have started them too fast⁷.

By acknowledging his playing as stylistically different, which in this case was evoked as performing pieces of the repertoire too fast, the harpist confirmed the validity of the distinction between the categories of the folklorised and the traditional. At that event, a series of pragmatic choices (such as playing in specific tempos and rhythmic ‘feel’) established the identity of the practice as traditional. Yet, such an enactment of constitutive elements needed to be adapted to the context in which the event took place. Clearly, the entanglement between reproduction and innovation is made material in the little *tarima*. This artefact establishes an epicentre for the circulation of elements, but its shape and size has different affordances than a regular *tarima*. Its portability and size make it possible to organise *fandangos* in unconventional spaces, establishing new forms of interaction. Dancing in groups or couples is replaced, for example, by the performance of a single dancer.

In their ordinariness, modified instruments provide a materialisation of the interplay between reproduction and innovation – in the case of *fandanguitos* in Portland, the smaller *tarima* exemplifies the ingenious adjustment of an artefact to enable the unfolding of events in particular circumstances. There are innumerable cases of improvisation and adjustment across communities of *son jarocho* practitioners. A telling example comes from a workshop for children in the US that has introduced adapted ukuleles to cover the demand for *jaranas*, as the attendance at these workshops is much higher than the number of traditional instruments that they can currently provide and afford. The need to make series of adjustments to reproduce a practice stems from a series of shared presuppositions about the appropriate ways of enacting it. This common ground is a product of the accumulation of enactments over time and space (Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2012), and a necessary condition of performances to take place. The recurrent enactment of practices establishes an ideal form of authenticity, which ranges from ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ (Kuijer, 2014: 77-80). Therefore, meaningful traditions are historical constructions that develop distinct

⁷ Excerpt from the fieldnotes taken after that *fandanguito*, United States, June 15, 2013.

identities through various forms of mobility and their encounter with essentialised narratives. It is to the relationships between mobilities and identities that we now turn.

‘Swaying’ between continuity and change

So far, I have argued that practices are both reproduced and transformed through mobilities produced during enactments and their recurrent accumulation over time and space. Each enactment contributes to the simultaneous reproduction of its structural forms and to its transformation (Schatzki, 2011). Two related questions arise from this paradoxical duality: How does the interplay between continuity and change intervene when old routines are performed in entirely new contexts? How do the specific characteristics of such contexts matter? As we have seen, performances are structured by relatively standardised elements: namely, rules and routines, and their adaptation to particular circumstances. *Son jarocho* has been diffused well beyond southeast Mexico in ‘swaying’ between continuity and change. Still, practitioners constantly establish various degrees of authenticity and adequacy by discursively evoking a tradition. Such representations are central to the ongoing construction of *son jarocho* as a recognisable entity and as performance.

There are two points that I would like to emphasise regarding the ways in which contexts intervene in the reproduction and transformation of practice. First, there is a greater adaptation and flexibility in the adherence to the rules and routines as practices become recurrently enacted in various contexts. This suggestion may appear as a straightforward truism: unsurprisingly, these ‘mutations’ (Law and Mol, 2001) are a typical consequence of the adoption of socially recognised ways of doing in different environments. A significant point, however, is that such adjustment rests on both the mobilities of practice during their enactment and as recognisable entities. Here I am not only referring to the fact of physical displacement – although it is a relevant facet of these processes as we saw in preceding sections. As Shove et al. (2012) and Hui (2013a) suggest, the physical travels of people and materials, and the circulation of ideas, meanings and know-how make possible the continuity of practice through their constant adjustment to new arrangements. There is, then, a reciprocal relationship between the circulation of elements that take place during enactments and the trajectories of recognisable practices.

Second, the dynamics of continuity and change are inevitably linked to questions of identity. Inquiring about the narratives that define the limits of a given practice is to examine the extent to which its mobilities leave it unchanged. Practices become consistent entities as practitioners recur in their enactment. As Shove and Pantzar (2007: 165) note, ‘practices acquire a separate identity through repetition. Stabilisation consequently occurs as practices are replicated in increasingly faithful ways by existing and new practitioners alike’. Furthermore, this faithful reproduction rests on essentialist narratives that seek to anchor the significance of practice-as-entity. The construction of the identity of cultural practices, as the case of *son jarocho* demonstrates, is central to their stabilisation as entities. Moreover, the essentialisation of practices is characterised by the entanglement between the identity of the practice (the demarcation of what the practice is in its ‘authentic’ form) and the identities of those who practise it (collective identities).

As much of the cultural research literature reminds us, identities do not constitute fixed entities, but rather dynamic, strategic and multifaceted processes (Hall and du Gay 1996). Stuart Hall (1996: 4) famously noted that identities are ‘processes of becoming rather than being’. Still, the dynamics between ways of being and belonging is constantly confronted with discourses that frame these identities as bounded, coherent and motionless. To examine the complex relationship between identities and the demarcation of what is authentic and acceptable in a practice, it is necessary to look at the processes through which this practice is both essentialised and put into action.

The narratives of authenticity and tradition that permeate *son jarocho* are forms of essentialism. By ‘essentialism’ I mean the belief that there are a series of characteristics that define the intrinsic nature of *son jarocho* as a tradition. The acceptance that something counts as an authentic element (namely a melodic line, a verse, a dance step or an instrument) usually takes the form of a narrative that presumes a congruence between the origins of this practice in a demarcated geographical region (Sotavento) and the enactment of these ways of doing. The narratives on tradition are essentialised conceptualisations that overlook the ways in which the practice becomes actualised. Despite their complex historical trajectories, traditions are often portrayed as fixed, rooted and permanent. Traditions are also felt and defended as representative of one’s identity. But as it has been illustrated in the previous sections of this article, the enactment of a traditional musical practice requires a flexible adherence to rules and routines.

Essentialist narratives on tradition do not fix practices to immutable conditions, but rather enable their mobility. Paradoxically, cultural practices are set in motion through the encounter between essentialism and the actualisation of practice. Motion, to borrow from Aristotle (Kosman, 1969: 40), ‘is the actualization of what potentially is, as such’. It is in the often problematic encounter between the meanings of fixity and the enactment of practices that reproduction and transformation become dynamically entwined. The ‘grip’ produced by the encounter of narratives of fixity and belonging, and the constant circulation of elements produces the traction that enables the mobilities of practice. Aware of the transformations that have come with the increasing popularity of *son jarocho*, practitioners worry about the disappearance of distinct elements of this practice. ‘*Se está perdiendo*’ [it is being lost] is so often repeated that it has become a type of mantra at *fandangos* and workshops, both in Mexico and the US. If the practice was apparently rescued from its foreseeable extinction, its resurgence and diffusion across geographically dispersed communities of practitioners is certainly changing its dynamics. Practitioners are conscious of these changes and stress the necessity of sustaining the practice in its traditional form, just as the practitioners from Sotavento are thought to have kept it alive for generations. Essentialising this practice as a tradition rooted in Sotavento is, in part, a reaction to such changes.

The constant search for the elements that produce traditional *son jarocho* elaborates an essentialised narrative that is crucial for the circulation of this practice as a recognisable entity and as a performance. *Son jarocho* has acquired a specific significance by being constructed as a musical tradition from Sotavento. The transnational processes involved in its actualisation in multiple locations across Mexico and the US have brought a series of dissonances that remind us of the fragile consistency of practices-as-entities. However, the enactment of practices is not a mere reproduction of structures of action. Through its gradual and continuous changes practice and practising are never entirely congruent, and never

entirely disassociated: their friction is a space for contention, improvisation and innovation. The encounter between discourses on a fixed tradition and the actualisation of the practice produces the necessary grip to mobilise the practice. Far from bringing the practice to a halt, narratives of authenticity are crucial for mobilising practice.

Conclusion

In relating theories of mobility and social practice, this article has emphasised the relevance of analysing the ways in which practices circulate at different levels. While this article embraces the fact of physical displacement, it puts forward an encompassing view of mobilities that considers various overlapping layers of circulation, diffusion, transference and displacement. The historical diffusion and transmission of specific ways of doing, the unfolding of performances, and the dissemination and adaptation of know-how, artefacts, rules and routines are the forms of circulation addressed in this article. To capture the reciprocal relationship among these processes, I have advanced the term 'mobilities of practice'.

Practices are simultaneously reproduced and transformed in and through mobility. The processes through which social practices circulate and become diffused across geographically dispersed locations cannot be fully understood without detailed analyses of the mobilities that take place during their enactment. Throughout performances, practitioners share sets of understandings and habitual dispositions that allow them to cultivate this practice within extended networks of relationships. In the case of *son jarocho*, however, there is a flexible adherence to the rules and routines as it is necessary to adapt each enactment to the specific circumstances of performance.

In analysing the consistency among enactments, this article has examined the specific circumstances of their production and the meanings that emerge in this process. Although narratives on authenticity and belonging often overlook the ways in which practices become actualised, their essentialisation allows practices to circulate as coherent performances and recognisable entities. While the apparent authenticity of a practice is delineated in its recurrent enactment, a constant adaptation of artefacts and flexible adherence to routines and rules is required for accomplishing these performances. Similarly, the boundaries that define the identity of practice are often breached or reshaped by enacting the practice in varying circumstances. I have also suggested that encounters between essentialised narratives and the enactment of practice are central to understand mobilities of practice. The friction between narratives on authenticity and belonging, and the circulation of practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance produces the traction that enables their continuity and change. Therefore, the difference between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance is a matter of scale as well as tempo. Because these two facets have a reciprocal and co-constitutive relationship, mobilities of practice is an entanglement of entities and performances produced through various forms of friction and circulation.

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